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AUTHOR	Grossman, David L.
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ABSTRACT

Data were collected in a cross-sectional survey of nine San Francisco Bay Area high schools in order to study the nature, intensity, and content of the experience of conflict and dissent in relation to the acquisition of generalized attitudes towards it. Educational climate was identified as a significant independent variable and other sources of variation, such as family and peer group environments and personality dimensions, were assessed. A multiple regression equation was formulated to ascertain the relative weight of factors influencing students' toleration of dissent. The most important finding was that neither of the socioeconomic status indicators had a relationship to toleration of dissent in adolescents. Both sex and ethnicity were significant, as were student perception of strictness of family, openness of expression of conflict with friends, and friends' interests in politics. Significant school-related variables included the number of controversial issue courses taken and the student's perception of freedom to express views in a classroom. References, tables, and measurement scales are included. (Author/KSM)

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EDUCATIONAL CLIMATES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DISSENT:

A STUDY OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF CONFLICT NORMS IN ADOLESCENTS

David L. Grossman

Stanford University

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EDUCATIONAL CLIMATES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DISSENT: A STUDY OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF CONFLICT NORMS IN ADOLESCENTS

Within recent years we find that political socialization research has impressively documented a fundamental gap between the learning of conflict-oriented attitudes and the impact of the schooling experience on American youth. While students are found to have acquired a generalized or "diffuse" support for political authority (Hess and Torney, 1967; Easton and Dennis, 1969), there is little evidence that their political learning includes dimensions of conflict acceptance such as toleration of dissent or concrete recognition of civil liberties (see e.g., Remmers, 1963; The National Assessment..., 1970).

Given the extant research on the civic education outcomes of the schooling experience, can we actually postulate any relationship between schooling and the learning of a conflict-oriented norm like toleration of dissent? Fortunately, certain recent research has indicated that "qualitative" as opposed to quantitative educational variables can be shown to have an impact on the learning of conflict-oriented political attitudes. In his study of West German youth (1971) Weiler found that school-related factors accounted for a significant amount of the variance in dissent toleration. Zellman and Sears (1971) found that increased exposure to instances of political conflict in the classroom increased students' toleration of conflict and acceptance of civil liberties.

Of more direct interest is Ehman's finding (1969) that substantial differences in such attitudes as political efficacy, political participation, and political cynicism occurred when students reported discussing controversial issues in what they perceived to be an "intellectually open" classroom climate. Ehman's climate scale represented an attempt to operationalize classroom structures in terms of being more or less

conducive to inquiry and controversy. However, Ehman's dependent variables all dealt with levels of regime support. It seemed promising to adapt, with some modifications and extensions, the notion of the open climate as used by Ehman, in an examination of the impact of classroom and school structures on a more conflict-oriented dependent variable, such as toleration of dissent.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Our principal set of hypotheses relates the nature, intensity, and content of the experience of conflict and dissent to the acquisition of generalized attitudes toward it. Specifically, this has led us to identify "educational climates" as a significant independent variable in terms of the degree to which they provide such experiences. Promising starts in the direction of accomplishing this rather complex task of measuring environments has been made in our own as well as other studies (see e.g., Nielsen and Kirk, 1972).

Moreover, in order to assess the relative weight of educational factors in the learning of dissent-oriented attitudes, we collected data on other possible sources of variation. In particular, we looked at family and peer group environments. SES-related data was also collected. Further, based on our reading of the literature, two personality dimensions were included: a) dogmatism, based on the work of Rokeach et al. (1960); and b) anomy, based on the work of Keniston (1960), and McClosky and Schaar (1965).

Our data were collected in a cross-sectional survey of nine San Francisco Bay Area high schools at two different grade levels, 10th and 12th. 80% of the sample was at the 12th-grade level. The schools were selected from two SES divisions based on two indicators: median family

income and per cent of high school graduates in the surrounding area's population. A minimum of six social studies classes in each school was surveyed, with the total student sample amounting to 1312.

THE MAJOR DEPENDENT VARIABLE: TOLERATION OF DISSENT

The major dependent variable, toleration of dissent, was conceptualized largely along lines developed by Weiler (1972). We have thus conceived of dissent toleration as an attitudinal orientation which is composed of varying latitudes of acceptance and rejection of controversial political behavior. Toleration of dissent is seen as an outcome of the political socialization process, and a disposition towards behaving in certain ways in encountering manifestations of conflict and dissent.

In operationalizing this concept for an American study, four areas of relevant political behavior were postulated. These four areas were construed as acceptance/rejection orientations towards: 1) the legitimacy of conflict in a democratic political system; 2) freedom of speech and expression; 3) nonviolent protest activities beyond speech and expression; and 4) dissent activities which did not reject the use of violence. These areas became sub-scales around which a pool of 40 items was created. In a pilot study these items were halved after analysis, and in the final study four additional items were dropped, yielding a final toleration of dissent scale of 16 items, paired negative/positive to control for response bias. The final scale is reported in the Appendix.

THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The major independent variables focused on the concept of "educational climate." Since our study was based at the secondary school level, we felt that both school and classroom environments would be relevant. Therefore, an effort was made to ascertain both the "climate" of the

school and the classroom unit surveyed. Based on our reading of the literature (Steele et al., 1970; Ehman, 1970), we relied on student perceptions of their own school and classroom environments. A combination of attitudinal and discrete items were utilized in measurement.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT SCALE

In this variable we attempted to establish a basis for distinguishing between relatively open and relatively closed school climates. Upon review of the literature, ten items were chosen to represent relevant dimensions of such climates. In a pilot study in two schools these ten items were found to have a high coefficient of reliability (KR_{20}=.835), and the scale was used intact in the final study. This scale is reproduced in the Appendix along with its related statistics.

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES

In addition to the school environment scale, a number of attitudinal itmes were included to measure students' perception of school rules and school quality. Discrete items were also included, such as a) number and type of social studies courses taken, and b) number of controversial issue-oriented courses taken. Certain environmental measures of the classrooms surveyed were collected. These included 1) the amount of time devoted to controversial issues, 2) the amount of student-teacher conflict, and 3) the student's willingness to express himself freely in the classroom.

FINDINGS

In order to ascertain the relative weight of factors influencing students' toleration of dissent, a multiple regression equation was formulated in which toleration of dissent was the dependent variable. Utilizing the multiple regression program from the Statistical Package

for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a stage-wise regression was run in which student background characteristics were entered first; family and peer group environment factors second; personal characteristics third; and school and classroom factors last. The variables in the equation numbered 28:

	sex
	ethnicity
	father's occupation
STAGE 1	father's education
	number of siblings
	live with both parents or not
	amount of conflict with parents
	strictness of parents
	parental activity in politics
	influence in family decisions
	frequency of political discussions at home
	amount of conflict with friends
	importance of same ideas in friends
	openness in conflict with friends
STAGE 2	interest of friends in politics
	anomy
	dogmatism
	participation in dissent activities
	plans after high school
	evaluation: school's contribution to personal goals
STAGE 3	grade average
	number of controversial issue courses
	number of social studies courses
	classroom: conflict with teacher
	classroom: openness with teacher
	classroom: time spent on controversial issues
	strictness of school rules
STAGE 4	school environment scale

The results of this equation are reported in Table I.

BACKGROUND FACTORS

The most important finding in terms of background characteristics, and perhaps one of the key findings of the whole study, was that neither of our socio-economic status indicators, father's occupation nor father's education, had a significant relationship to toleration of dissent scores. This more than confirmed our hypotheses that even after such socio-economic

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION PREDICTING TOLERATION OF DISSENT
IN TWELFTH GRADE SAMPLE
(N = 1091)

VARIABLE	Multiple R	R Square	RSQ Change	Simple R	Beta	F
Sex	0.12	0.01	0.01	0.12	0.13	19.91**
Ethnicity	0.12	0.01	0.00	-0.01	-0.09	9.41**
Father's Occupation	0.17	0.03	0.01	0.12	0.03	0.94
Father's Education	0.17	0.03	0.00	0.10	0.01	0.14
Number of Siblings	0.17	0.03	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.16
Live With Both Parents	0.19	0.03	0.00	-0.05	-0.03	1.36
Same Ideas as Friends	0.19	0.04	0.00	-0.04	0.01	0.04
Influence in Family	0.21	0.05	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.77
Conflict With Parents	0.25	0.06	0.02	0.13	0.10	11.90**
Parents' Political Activity	0.26	0.07	0.00	-0.05	-0.07	5.94*
Home Political Discussion	0.29	0.08	0.01	0.13	0.04	1.61
Strictness of Parents	0.32	0.10	0.02	0.16	0.13	23.41**
Conflict With Friends	0.33	0.11	0.00	0.13	0.02	0.55
Openness With Friends	0.35	0.12	0.01	0.15	0.08	8.04**
Friends' Political Interest	0.37	0.13	0.01	0.16	0.06	4.00*
Anomy	0.42	0.18	0.04	-0.26	-0.03	0.73
Dogmatism	0.50	0.25	0.08	-0.40	-0.29	79.55**
Participation in Dissent	0.52	0.27	0.02	0.24	0.14	24.56**
Post-H.S. Plans	0.52	0.27	0.00	0.08	-0.01	0.20
Grade Average	0.53	0.28	0.00	0.12	0.07	5.24*
Controversial Issue Courses	0.53	0.28	0.01	0.15	0.11	13.27**
Social Studies Courses	0.53	0.29	0.00	0.11	0.02	0.30
Openness With Teacher	0.54	0.29	0.00	0.17	0.07	5.50*
Strictness/School Rules	0.54	0.29	0.00	0.12	0.06	3.97*
% Classtime Controversial	0.54	0.29	0.00	0.02	-0.02	0.57
Rate School's Contribution	0.55	0.30	0.00	-0.06	-0.05	2.86
Conflict With Teacher	0.55	0.30	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.00
School Environment Scale	0.55	0.30	0.00	-0.12	-0.08	6.28*

**Significant at .01

*Significant at .05

characteristics were controlled, environmental factors would be significant variables in predicting dissent toleration in adolescents.

Among other background factors, sex and ethnicity were both significant at the .01 level. On the case of sex (Beta=.13), being female was negatively related to high scores on the toleration of dissent scale. Upon further examination, it was found that the only significant differences between the male and female sub-samples were on the range of protest subscale ($p<.05$), and the use of violence subscale ($p<.01$). It seems that the female members of the sample were less tolerant of more physical manifestations of dissent, especially where violence was implied.

In the case of ethnicity, being a non-white American was significantly related to toleration of dissent, i.e., non-whites tended to be more tolerant. However, since the total non-white portion of the sample was approximately 15%, and divided among a variety of racial and ethnic groups, we hesitate to make generalizations here.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Of the family-related variables, three achieved acceptable levels of significance ($p<.05$). The strongest of these factors (Beta=.13) was the students' perception of the strictness of the family. The less strict that the parents were perceived, the higher was the tendency to tolerate dissent. The amount of conflict with parents was also positively related to toleration of dissent (Beta=.10). Parental political activity was also significant, but the magnitude of the relationship was not as great (Beta=.07). In general, these findings confirm that at least in the case of the family, the experience of conflict is related to students' toleration of dissent.

PEER GROUP FACTORS

Two peer group variables achieved a significant relationship with toleration of dissent. Both the openness with which conflicts with friends were expressed (Beta=.08), and friends' interest in politics (Beta=.06) were significant, though neither Beta value was of a size that would attract a great deal of interest. At least there is evidence of a relationship between peer group environment and toleration of dissent.

PERSONALITY FACTORS

Our inclusion of two personality measures, dogmatism and anomy, represented an attempt to include that dimension of interaction between personality and structural variables which is all too often absent in this type of research. Our effort was rewarded in the sense that dogmatism had the largest Beta value (-.29) of any of our independent variables. Students who scored high on personal dogmatism tended to score low in toleration of dissent. Further analysis did not show dogmatism to be highly inter-correlated with other factors. Anomy did not prove significant. (Here we might add that anomy did prove significant in relationship to participation in dissent activities.)

PARTICIPATION IN DISSENT ACTIVITIES

In research on the political orientations of students in 1973, a study would have to take into account the possible relationship between previous participation in dissent or other protest activities and political attitudes. Participation in dissent activities was indeed significant (Beta=.14), and the magnitude of its Beta value indicates it was a variable of some importance. While we have chosen to treat participation in dissent activities as an intervening variable here, we would speculate

that the nature and direction of the inter-relationship between participation in dissent and toleration of dissent is a more complex issue than can be dealt with in the context of this study.

SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

Several school-related variables were significantly related to toleration of dissent. The most important of these variables was the number of controversial issue courses taken (Beta=.11). Another significant factor, and a related one, was a student's perception of his/her freedom to express his/her own views in the classroom surveyed. We feel that these findings support our hypotheses about the relationship between educational climates and toleration of dissent, and confirm the studies of Ehman (1969) and Zellman and Sears (1971).

The School Environment Scale also proved significant in predicting toleration of dissent (Beta=-.08). However, the sign of this Beta value is negative. This indicates that the more closed that students perceived their school environment, the greater was their tendency to tolerate dissent. The direction of this relationship is paralleled in the case of the school strictness variable. The more strict that students perceived their school's rules, the greater was their tendency to tolerate dissent. While neither of these Beta values was especially large, this is one result to be pondered. While non-strictness in the family environment and openness of conflict in the peer group environment are associated with toleration of dissent, are we to conclude that "closed" and strict schools are related to toleration of dissent?

Aside from the issue of the sensitivity of our instrument in assessing such environments, we would suggest that in the process of assessing complex and relatively abstract social environments, such as a school environment, the social psychological "fit" between personality and structural factors

becomes important. For example, whether one judges a climate to be relatively "open" or "closed" might be affected in part by the degree to which one finds himself/herself in conflict with the various structures in that system. Possibly then, a dissent-oriented person may experience a relatively greater degree of conflict in most school environments, because the institutional structures (which for the most part do not vary widely) are incongruent with his/her social psychological make-up. In this context, a relationship between perceptions of schools as relatively "closed" environments and high levels of dissent toleration does not seem unreasonable provided that a) no causality is implied, and b) the subjective nature of the climate evaluation is noted.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In predicting toleration of dissent scores for our 12th grade sample, it was interesting that our two major SES measures did not prove significant. This gives weight to our hypothesis that environmental factors beyond SES should have explanatory value for differing levels of toleration of dissent. Indeed, certain factors in all three domains - family, peer group, and school - did achieve a significant relationship with toleration of dissent. It seems that our basic hypothesis, i.e., that dissent toleration is largely determined by the experience of conflict in these domains, is supported.

Given that our major interest was the school-related set of variables, it was important that school factors, and particularly the number of controversial issue courses, were significant. However, the relationship between the school environment and toleration of dissent was complicated by the negative relationship found between our own school environment scale and the dependent variable. While we can speculate that such a relationship also indicates a measure of the intensity of the experience of conflict in the school, it would be difficult to go further without more sensitivity in our technique of measuring environments. This might include a combination of subjective and objective measures of school climates.

Beyond this, our research indicates that an important, though often neglected factor, is the interaction between personality and structural factors. The fact that personal dogmatism showed the strongest relationship with toleration of dissent cannot be ignored, and suggests that further research should follow on the interaction of personality types with varying environmental structures.

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APPENDIX

OVERALL DISSENT SCALE TWO

VAR. NO.	SUBSCALE	ITEM	ITEM-SCALE CORRELATIONS
005	Protscal	People should not obey a law if they believe it to be unjust.	.47
006	Frspeech	Newspapers and magazines should be allowed to print any opinions they want.	.42
010	Vioscale	People are sometimes justified in using violence to change an unjust situation.	.32
011	Legdiss	The minority should be free to criticize majority decisions.	.43
013	Protscal	When the issue is important enough, it may be necessary to break the law to get things changed.	.57
014	Legdiss	It's all right for people to raise questions about even the most sacred matters.	.39
017	Frspeech	A book that contains wrong political views does not deserve to be published.	.47
019	Protscal	There is no excuse to break laws, no matter what the issue.	.63
022	Legdiss	If the majority of people approve of something, then the minority should go along and not criticize.	.35
028	Vioscale	Sometimes violence has to be used to bring attention to the changes needed in this society.	.45
030	Vioscale	Demonstrations which might result in the breaking of windows and the destruction of property should never be allowed.	.49
036	Vioscale	No matter what the issue, violent confrontation with the police or other legal authorities is never justified.	.53
037	Frspeech	Freedom of opinion and discussions have to be limited when important values are at stake.	.45
038	Legdiss	Obedience to authority is the most important quality of a good citizen.	.58
039	Protscal	When our rights have been violated, we have the right to protest, even if it means breaking a law.	.56
041	Frspeech	Everybody can say what he wants in private, but we should not allow anyone to attack our form of government in public.	.52

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$KR_{20} = 16/15 \left(\frac{137.216-37.889}{137.216}\right) = .772$

DOGMATISM SCALE TWO *

VAR. NO.	ITEM	ITEM-SCALE CORRELATIONS
008	To compromise with our opponents is dangerous because it usually leads to the betrayal of our own side.	.51
009	The main thing in life is for a person to want to do something important.	.52
016	There are two kinds of people in this world: those who are for the truth and those who are against the truth.	.60
021	Of all the philosophies in the world there is probably only one which is correct.	.58
024	In this complicated world of ours the only way we can know what's going on is to rely on leaders who can be trusted.	.52
026	The present is all too full of unhappiness. It is only the future that counts.	.55
032	I'd like it if I could find someone who would tell me how to solve my personal problems.	.51
033	It is only when a person devotes himself to an ideal or cause that life becomes meaningful.	.50

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$$KR_{20} = 8/7 * \frac{(46.228-20.463)}{46.228} = .64$$

*These items were adopted from the Troldahl and Powell Short Dogmatism Scale (1965). The complete scale can be found in John P. Robinson and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes. Ann Arbor: Insitute for Social Research, 1969, p. 351.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT SCALE

VAR. NO.	ITEM	ITEM-SCALE CORRELATIONS
042	Teachers relate classroom subject matter to current major issues.	.42
043	Students are accepted as individuals who are capable of making decisions about their own lives.	.64
044	The atmosphere in the classrooms is reasonably relaxed.	.63
045	On issues that directly affect students, students can have a major impact on decisions.	.55
046	It is easy to talk to teachers.	.60
047	Students are given the opportunity to direct their own studies.	.57
048	Classroom discussions are interesting or exciting.	.49
049	Even when they disagree with a teacher, students are allowed to freely express their opinions in class.	.65
050	Values and value conflicts in American society are discussed in the classroom.	.51
051	Taking everything into consideration, students generally like this school.	.58

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$KR_{20} = 10/9 \left(\frac{102.844-32.063}{102.844}\right) = .76$

SUBSCALES OF OVERALL DISSENT SCALE TWO

	Free Speech Subscale — Item	Item-Subscale correlations
006	Newspapers and Magazines should be allowed to print any opinions they want.	.61
017	A book that contains wrong political views does not deserve to be published.	.69
037	Freedom of opinion and discussions have to be limited when important values are at stake.	.71
041	Everybody can say what he wants in private, but we should not allow anyone to attack our form of government in public.	.69
	KR_{20}= .60	

Legitimacy of Dissent Subscale

011	The minority should be free to criticize majority decisions.	.60
014	It's all right for people to raise questions about even the most sacred matters.	.55
022	If the majority of people approve of something, then the minority should go along and not criticize.	.54
038	Obedience to authority is the most important quality of a good citizen.	.62
	KR_{20}= .54	

Range of Protest Subscale

005	People should not obey a law if they believe it to be unjust.	.66
013	When the issue is important enough, it may be necessary to break the law to get things changed.	.75
019	There is no excuse to break laws, no matter what the issue.	.74
039	When our rights have been violated, we have the right to protest, even if it means breaking a law.	.67
	KR_{20}= .73	

Toleration of Violence Subscale

010	People are sometimes justified in using violence to change an unjust situation.	.68
028	Sometimes violence has to be used to bring attention to the changes needed in this society.	.74
030	Demonstrations which might result in the breaking of windows and the destruction of property should never be allowed.	.60
036	No matter what the issue, violent confrontation with the police or other legal authorities is never justified. KR_{20}=.59	.68

ANOMY SCALE*

VAR. NO.	ITEM	ITEM-SCALE CORRELATIONS
012	It seems to me that other people find it easier to decide what is right than I do.	.47
018	What is lacking in the world today is the old kind of friendship that lasted for a lifetime.	.62
025	The trouble with the world today is that most people don't believe in anything.	.58
027	Everything changes so quickly these days that I often have trouble deciding which are the right rules to follow.	.61
034	With everything so uncertain these days, it almost seems as though anything could happen.	.44
035	People were better off in the old days when everyone knew just how he was expected to act.	.55
040	With everything in such a state of disorder, it's hard for a person to know where he stands from one day to the next.	.65

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$KR_{20} = 7/6 * \frac{(34.326-15.75)}{34.326} = .63$

*These items were adopted from the McClosky and Schaar Anomy Scale (1965). The complete scale and a relevant discussion can be found John P. Robinson and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1969, pp. 168-171.